Assignment: Reflection 2

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How important is the literature review (and differentiating between various types of journals) and assessing prior research, theorists, and current instructional strategies?

Literature review is very critical to any kind of research. Literature review is “an account of what has been published on a topic by accredited scholars and researchers.” (University of Toronto). Anytime someone selects a topic for research they must first begin with a literature review. Before a researcher can begin their own research, they must first learn what is already known about the topic and how much work has already been done. The review should describe, summarize, evaluate, and clarify the currently available published research work. Literature review serves as a theoretical base for new research. As part of my own literature review I expect to learn that some areas have been well researched and much information is already known, while in other areas there has been little research and only a limited amount of information is available.

There are three types of journals: popular magazines, trade and professional periodicals, and scholarly journals. Popular magazines inform general readers about general ideas in a variety of topics. Articles are typically written by reporters and journalists, there are few academic and scholarly authors. Of the three types of journals, popular magazines are the least reliable resource for research. In my own work their greatest use is as a starting point for more in-depth research. Most journalists will quote and/or reference experts of a field. Researching those experts and their work can lead to information I need. Popular magazines still have a place in the academic world as well. Most people of the general public do not immediately accept new ideas. They (we) must be convinced and persuaded. A good idea in a well written article can help that idea spread throughout the public. Trade and professional periodicals inform an educated audience about a specific subject, such as a law magazine written by and for lawyers. These periodicals provide summaries of recent research in the specific subject. The information might not be highly specialized or detailed. Scholarly journals inform an expert audience about highly specialized information and provide publication of original research findings. I’ve heard that in some fields the current level of knowledge and research can be so highly specialized that maybe only 10 people in the world can read and understand new research findings. Scholarly journals will be the basis and primary resource of my research. This source is the most reliable and most specified form of journalism available to me. Popular magazines are written primarily to entertain and secondly to inform, trade periodicals are written to provide professionals with useful and timely information, and scholarly journals are written for the purpose of publishing research. Research is my goal and interest in this project, and it is where I will find most of my information.

In assessing prior research, I see two primary areas that must be weighed. The first is to determine what research, results, data, and knowledge is relevant and useful my own research, and what is irrelevant. The second is to identify strengths and weaknesses of that prior research and how those strengths and weaknesses relate to my own subject. These two areas will likely overlap and be tightly intertwined. As an example for my own topic, there has been much research done regarding ELL students and bilingual immersion, but I expect there will be less information available about how to use language to better integrate students in a classroom. Assessing prior research will also assist me in eliminating potential weaknesses in my research.

Theorists and current instructional strategies both offer useful information in my research, but each is limited as to what information they can provide. A theory has no limit for what it can be. A theory does not need to be proven, nor tested. It only needs to be an idea or system of ideas intended to explain something. In my own research students of different immigration backgrounds choose to self-separate in the classroom. My theory is that this is in part due to a language barrier. By contrast current instructional strategies are highly limited in what they can be. In many ways this is a good thing, we don’t want just any educational and teaching theories finding their way into a classroom. The largest control mechanism regarding current instructional strategies come from laws and regulations at the local, state and federal levels. For my research current instructional strategy is more useful. In most cases there will be a theory, the testing of that theory by way of using it in a classroom, and the results of that test. Theory can provide great ideas and highly plausible explanations, but without testing we can’t truly know if that theory is correct. Educators, politicians, and parents are mostly results focused. Theorists can provide ideas and inspiration for my research, and current strategies can guide me towards what is more likely to be a successful teaching method. In summary, theorists provide almost endless ideas, while current strategies show what works and what doesn’t.